

**ISSUE BRIEF**  
**Implementing an Effective and Timely Process for Allocating Forest Health Funds**  
**NAASF Forest Health Committee**  
**July 2011**

**Summary:**

In FY 2011, proposals to deal with special forest health issues were included in the Northeastern Area's Competitive Allocation Request for Proposals. After two years of using a competitive process to allocate forest health funding, the NA State Forest Health Program Managers agree that this is neither strategic nor effective for addressing forest health issues, especially the response to pest outbreaks, new introductions, and unforeseen forest health issues.

For FY 2012, the NAASF Forest Health Committee (FHC) recommends that the Competitive Allocation Request for Proposals be discontinued for distributing forest health funds, except for the nationally agreed 15% that is set aside for S&PF Redesign. The FHC is committed to working with the State Foresters and the US Forest Service Northeastern Area to design an alternative collaborative process. Such a process should be based on strategic plans for addressing current issues. Annual project priorities should be determined collaboratively with all partners, including universities and state agriculture agencies. The process should be transparent, and have clear accomplishment reporting requirements. It could consist of a combination of processes, and could include a competitive component where that would be most effective. Funding for special national forest health program initiatives should remain intact.

**Background:**

For FY 2010, Forest Health Protection proposals dealing with five forest health concerns (Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, hemlock woolly adelgid, invasive plants, and "significant and emerging forest health issues") were subject to a competitive grant process. In FY 2011, proposals to deal with special forest health concerns were included in NA's Competitive Allocation Request for Proposals (CARP). Significantly, only NA has developed and implemented a competitive process so widely. Ultimately, according to the FY 2011 NA-S&PF CARP Announcement, the Northeastern Area "received a higher level of funding in Forest Health...than in the past," "used the proposals solicited through the CARP process to allocate these additional funds," and funded projects, in part, to "best meet Congressional intent." Nonetheless, the NA State Forest Health Program Managers agree that the competitive process has been neither an effective nor efficient way to allocate forest health funds.

Significant pests, and other forest health issues, are funded at the national level because of their broad potential impact on forest sustainability. Activities that focus on prevention, containment, or management of these damaging organisms should have a unified and strategic approach both at the multi-state level, and between states and the US Forest Service. Some, like hemlock woolly adelgid and gypsy moth, have a long track record of being addressed through such an approach.

In discussing an all-lands approach to the challenges facing our forests, Chief Tom Tidwell emphasizes that "...challenges cross borders and boundaries: no single entity can meet them alone." The NA states have a long history of collaboration on forest health issues. Existing efforts include the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Initiative, the Forest Pest Outreach and Survey Program (for emerald ash borer and Asian longhorned beetle) and the Gypsy Moth Slow the Spread (STS) program.

The NA State Assessments and Resource Strategies also support a collaborative approach. They are closely aligned when it comes to forest health issues, with every state citing forest health maintenance and/or protection as priorities. Forest health is a critical component to keeping forests as forests on a regional scale. Although each state has unique forest health issues, forest ecosystems, and social communities, efforts in every state are essential in addressing forest health across the region.

In addition to collaboration between states, forest health programs are strengthened by cooperation between responsible agencies. These partners include state departments of agriculture, regional and national plant boards, USDA-APHIS, universities, and all branches of the US Forest Service at local, regional, and national levels. Organizations like The Nature Conservancy (TNC) also bring stakeholders to the table, and play an important role in communicating the need to address forest health issues. The US Forest Service State and Private Forestry has been instrumental in supporting collaborative efforts, and is in a good position to continue in this role. This spring both the Eastern and Central Plant Boards have passed resolutions requesting changes in the Competitive Allocation Process, citing concerns about funding for invasive pests, ongoing suppression and eradication projects, agency responsibilities and authorities, and cooperative relationships among responsible state agencies.

### **Issues:**

*A predictable, strategic approach.* Forest health protection is an ongoing process, not a project. On-again off-again activities are ineffective. To manage the program, we must use a longer planning horizon, and be prepared to invest in long-term projects. The USDA National Gypsy Moth Management Program and the HWA Initiative are good examples. Both manage a pest across jurisdictional and regional boundaries; both involve participation by the lead agencies and other stakeholders; both have a unique management structure through which allocation of federal funding is discussed and recommended on the basis of what is good for the program. Similar approaches should be considered for other pest issues like invasive plants, ALB and EAB.

*Integrity of regional and national efforts.* Efforts in one state strongly influence results in adjacent states. A competitive process leaves gaps in the program, and therefore gaps on the landscape. A competitive process also pits regional partners against one another, and undermines the integrity of a consistent regional response to pest issues. For example, a consistent approach across NA states for thousand canker disease (TCD) surveys would have been greatly enhanced through collaborative discussions with partners and the Forest Service.

*Collaboration of federal and state forest health technical staff during project development.* A competitive process hinders the discussions essential to focus resources where they are most needed. State departments of agriculture play an important role in program delivery. In many states, they are lead agencies in responding to exotic forest pests. However, they were neither recognized as equal partners nor consistently a part of the competitive process.

*Oversight and input at the executive levels.* Increased involvement of State Foresters was a positive development in FY 2011. In many cases, this resulted in increased communication, more integrated delivery of services, involvement of other forestry program areas, and a better link to state strategies. However, communication and collaboration between state forestry and agriculture agencies needs to be enhanced so that roles, responsibilities, and authorities are clearly understood.

*A fair and transparent decision-making process.* The competitive process was not transparent to state forest health staff, as communication with the field offices was restricted. There was even less transparency for

collaborators from other agencies, and for appropriators who provided funds targeting specific forest health issues. A number of forest health managers are at a disadvantage because they do not have sufficient staff to wordsmith multiple grant proposals.

*A process that allows timely action.* The FY 2011 competitive process, as implemented, was very slow. Rapid response to emerging pest problems requires flexibility. Timing is also critical for projects keyed to pest development, like treatments that must be done within a biological window. Delays add too much uncertainty, and preclude the lead time necessary for planning, hiring, procurement, outreach, and environmental review.

*Efficient use of resources.* The additional layer of administration involved with a competitive process is not necessary for accomplishing our collective goal. The competitive process unnecessarily consumed significant staff time at both the state and federal level. This staff time could have been applied to interagency collaboration and project planning.

*Science-based priority setting and project review.* Although forest health is a specialty within forestry, the review of proposals did not incorporate a robust technical review by program specialists. Specialists are best able to assess whether a planned project can achieve its goals, to determine whether an ongoing project is no longer productive, and to assess how well projects fit a regional response to specific issues. Involvement of federal program specialists is particularly important in assessing the fit with multi-state or multi-regional responses.

*Opportunities to develop new tools for tackling forest health issues.* Technology development and methods improvement activities should not be confused with research. Without a vibrant program of technology development and methods improvement, the Forest Service and state forestry and agriculture agencies cannot evaluate and implement new tools to improve forest health programs and tactics for responding to new pests. However, these activities should not be rolled into state forest health programs, because they may not provide immediate benefits to the state with the most qualified facility to accomplish the work. If a particular university has the needed expertise and capacity, allocated funds should not be counted against dollar limits going to any one state.

## **Recommendation:**

The NAASF Forest Health Committee recommends that the Competitive Allocation Request for Proposals be discontinued for distributing Forest Health funds, except for the agreed upon 15% through the S&PF Redesign process. The FHC offers to work with the State Foresters and the US Forest Service Northeastern Area to design an alternative collaborative process that will address all needs. We suggest that the following should be components of this process:

- Ensure that strategic plans are in place for addressing current issues.
  - Use existing plans, where available, for major pests.
  - Incorporate strategies from State Assessments.
  - Include objectives, prioritize activities, and identify tools needed.
  - Identify roles, responsibilities and authorities of other forest pest programs particularly within the state departments of agriculture.
  - Present strategic plans to State Foresters, and other responsible authorities, for review and concurrence.
  - Review and revise plans annually.

- Annual project priorities should be determined collaboratively with partners, through a transparent process.
  - NAASF Forest Health Committee and the US Forest Service will work cooperatively to propose funding allocations based on strategic plans.
  - Project development should include all impacted and threatened states.
  - Projects should allow flexibility for individual state needs.
  - Recommendations should be made in consultation with National Plant Board counterparts.
  - Projects can be scaled to available funds.
  - Oversight and input to be provided by State Foresters.
  - Oversight and input to be requested from state plant pest regulatory officials when dealing with federally and state regulated pests.
  
- Accomplishment reporting should be clear and transparent.
  - Develop criteria to ensure that objectives are met.
  - Include documentation of how the Assessment and Strategies have been addressed.
  
- Special forest health programs should remain intact.
  - Continue to participate fully in national initiatives with management structures already in place, such as the HWA Initiative and Gypsy Moth STS.
  - Continue participation in nationally implemented competitive processes for addressing regional and local forest health issues, emerging issues, and special projects and evaluations (e.g. Evaluation Monitoring projects, the Special Technology Development program, the FS-Pesticide Impact Assessment program, the Early Detection Rapid Response program, Sudden Oak Death surveys, and others).
  - Continue the competitive process for the allocation of S&PF Redesign funding.
  - Resume identification of treatment project funding requests for all pests (e.g. gypsy moth, oak wilt, HWA, invasive plants, and native pests) through a call letter in the fall of each year.

**Resources:**

US Forest Service, 2010 Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies in the Northeast and Midwest: A Regional Summary

<http://www.northeasternforests.org/FRPC/files/1302705703RegSummary-StateAssessStrategy-2011-04-08.pdf>

Eastern Plant Board 2011 Annual Meeting Resolution, Northeastern Area (NA) State and Private Forestry (S & PF) Competitive Allocation Process [http://nationalplantboard.org/docs/epb\\_resolution\\_2011\\_3\\_fs.pdf](http://nationalplantboard.org/docs/epb_resolution_2011_3_fs.pdf)

Central Plant Board 2011 Annual Meeting Resolution No. 2, Northeastern Area (NA) State and Private Forestry (S & PF) Competitive Allocation Process

Statement of Tom Tidwell, USDA Forest Service Chief Before the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Concerning The President's Budget Request for the USDA Forest Service in Fiscal Year 2012 March 8, 2011

<http://naturalresources.house.gov/UploadedFiles/TidwellTestimony03.08.11.pdf>